



## Kuna Rural Fire District

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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#### **Kuna Rural Fire District Facing Challenges to Service**

##### *Call Volumes and Overlapping Calls Increasing*

Kuna, Idaho — Call volumes for the Kuna Rural Fire District have increased 72.42% in the past 10 years (17.3% in the last year alone). Overlapping calls – or emergencies that happen at the same time – are coming in 25% of the time now. The Fire District charges “impact fees” for new development. However, that revenue can’t be used to hire additional firefighters, and is not enough to build a station the community requires.

“We want to be transparent with our community. That means sharing information in good times and bad,” said Chief T.J. Lawrence. “The truth is that we’re struggling. The population in our Fire District is projected to increase by 74% in the next 10 years. Call volumes are skyrocketing, and we require additional personnel to keep up.”

In 2021, the KRFD stopped transporting patients to area hospitals because it took emergency personnel out of the service area for multiple hours. This decision kept firefighters in the District to respond to higher call volumes and overlapping calls. Ada County Paramedics is now providing transport services out of the Kuna Fire Station.

The Fire District has just five personnel per shift to respond to over 2,000 calls per year. This includes a three-person engine company. The National Fire Protection Association says a minimum of four firefighters should be on an engine. Two others are in a smaller “squad” vehicle primarily for medical emergencies. Overlapping calls happen 25% of the time, and residents are expressing frustration.

“I’ve received calls from community members asking why it took us so long to show up when they needed us,” said Chief Lawrence. “It’s really hard to receive those calls, and try to explain that we had no firefighters to send at that time.”

The KRFD has asked voters to double its operating levy to fund additional personnel and facilities, but those efforts were unsuccessful. Operating levy increases require a 66.66% approval to pass.

Adequate facilities are as important as firefighters to saving lives and property. The KRFD has a Capital Improvement Plan to identify stations and apparatus needed to serve the community as it grows. The Plan calls for building and equipping two fire stations over the next 10 years. The NFPA standard is one station for every 10,000 residents. The KRFD has just one station for its 33,390 residents. Impact fees on growth and new development help build facilities, but capital items are costly and require additional funding. Bond funding for capital items requires a 50% approval rating.

After the last election, the agency surveyed residents about how to fund these emergency service improvements. The response was largely positive, but residents said the amount the Fire District had asked for was too much.

Fire District personnel retooled the proposal to lower the annual amount for taxpayers. At this point, the Board of Fire Commissioners is considering asking voters for a smaller operating levy increase for additional personnel, and a bond to build just one fire station instead of two. The projected cost for both proposals would be \$8.70 per month (\$104.40 per year) for the average homeowner. An average home in the Fire District is defined as \$325,000 based on a property being a primary residence and includes the homeowner's exemption.

"We will have public meetings before the Board makes its final decision," said Chief Lawrence. "I just want to be clear that we have a problem, and we want to partner with our community to solve it."

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*The Kuna Rural Fire District (KRFD) provides fire suppression, life safety, and emergency medical services to 33,390 people across 110 square miles. Fifteen full-time firefighters responded to more than 2,007 calls in 2021 – a 72.42% increase compared to 10 years ago. EMS accounts for 63% of all calls, and overlapping calls occur 25% of the time. The agency operates under a balanced budget, is debt free, and has passed all its independent audits per state law.*